

BULLETIN

of the

CATHOLIC THEATRE CONFERENCE

Emmet Lavery, Chairman
E. Francis McDovitt, Editor

VOL. I

JULY 15, 1937

NUMBER I

OUR FIRST BULLETIN

We herewith present the first issue of the BULLETIN of the Catholic Theatre Conference, which was recommended and authorized at the first meeting of this Conference, held at Chicago on June 14 and 15, of this year.

In accordance with the desires of the Conference, expressed at the meeting in June, we are seeking to make of this BULLETIN an organ for the dissemination of information regarding Catholic drama groups throughout the country and also a medium for the exchange of ideas among the various group members of the Conference.

We invite our readers freely to use the BULLETIN for these purposes and thus further the interests of the Conference as a whole.

THE CHICAGO MEETING

The initial meeting of the Catholic Theatre Conference was called by Emmet Lavery with the cooperation of the Rev. F.G. Dineen, S.J., of Loyola Community Theater, and an advisory committee of prominent Catholics to set in motion the organization of a federation of the Catholic drama groups in the country.

The principal achievement of the Conference was the formation of a tentative organization with a temporary executive committee and officers to serve until the Conference in Washington, August 7 and 8. Those chosen to fill these offices are:

Emmet Lavery, Chairman
Rev. John H. Mahoney, Vice-Chairman
Rev. F.G. Dineen, S.J., Vice-Chairman
E. Francis McDovitt, Secretary-Treasurer

Rev. Francis X. Talbot, S.J.	(
Rev. Urban Nagle, O.P.)	
Rev. J.J. McLarney, O.P.	(
Norman Griffin)	Executive Committee
Sister Mary Louis	(
Margaret Ryan)	

Need for Conference Shown

The need and desire for a more or less closely knit organization of Catholic drama groups in the United States was unmistakably reflected not only in the number of registered delegates at the convention, but in the keen interest and enthusiasm displayed by scheduled speakers and the conferees at large. The sessions themselves emphasized to everyone the necessity of an organization which can service Catholic drama groups in the way of spreading information about Catholic theatrical activities in parishes, schools and Little Theater groups and in thus affording an opportunity for the exchange of ideas with mutually beneficial results. Most of the conferees openly expressed their amazement at their own ignorance as to what other Catholic groups were achieving in the drama.

A recapitulation of the registration list discloses that 416 persons attended as duly authorized representatives of Catholic drama groups. These represented 27 States and Canada. Of this total 128 represented schools, colleges, theater guilds, dramatic clubs and the like. The total number of cities and villages represented was 114.

Interesting Program Arranged

The sessions included several general meetings, entertainment in the form of plays, demonstrations, and the like, exhibits and addresses by prominent persons in the Catholic Theater Field.

Among the notable speakers were: the Rev. Francis X. Talbot, S.J., Editor-in-Chief of America; the Rev. Daniel A. Lord, S.J., who gave the keynote address; the Rev. Urban Nagle, O.P., founder of the Blackfriars' Guild; the Rev. Dr. John H. Mahoney, of the Catholic Theater Guild, New York; the Rev. George Stemm, of Columbia College, Dubuque, Ia.; the Rev. J.J. McLarny, O.P., of the De Paul University, Chicago; the Rev. Gilbert V. Hartke, O.P., of the Catholic University, Washington, D.C.; the Rev. Francis A. Gowney, of Buffalo; the Rev. M. Helfen, of the Catholic Dramatic Movement in Wisconsin.

The entertainment consisted of a production by the Loyola Community Theater of Mr. Lavery's "Monsignor's Hour"; a puppet play by the students of Marygrove College, Detroit; a scene from an original play, "Jeanne d'Arc," by the Verse Speaking Choir of Mundelein College, under the direction of Sister Mary Leola, B.V.M.; a radio play by the students of Rosary College, under the direction of Sister Mary Peter, O.P.; and a musical fantasy, "Sit Down," by Dorothy Day, produced by pupils of St. Elizabeth's High School.

The principal business accomplishments of the conference, other than the election of the officers and the executive board, was the appointment of committees and the passage of several resolutions. The personnel of the committees, insofar as they have been completed, appear elsewhere in this BULLETIN.

The resolutions expressed gratitude to His Eminence George Cardinal Mundelein, Archbishop of Chicago, for his graciousness in acting as Patron of the sessions; expressed appreciation to His Excellency, the Most Rev. Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, and the Most Rev. Michael J. Curley, Archbishop of Baltimore, for their interest in and sympathy toward the work of the Conference; thanked the Loyola Community Theater, Father Dineen, and Charles Costello for the hospitality offered the delegates; thanked Father Talbot for his interest and cooperation; encouraged the delegates to support and attend the sessions of the Conference in Washington in August; expressed appreciation to the WPA Federal Theater Project for its current compilation of a list of Catholic plays, and expressed the regret of the Conference at the termination of the activities of the Paulist Fathers' station, WLMR.

Practicable Plan Assured

We all rejoice in the tremendous demonstration of strength at Chicago and assure the Conference members that the simplest yet most practicable plan for a permanent organization will be advanced at the Washington meeting. That plan, when submitted by Father Lord's Constitution Committee, will determine the kind of membership, the amount of dues, and the best methods of clearing the available material on plays, techniques and kindred questions.

Needless to say, we are all agreed that the plan should be broad enough to cover every field of Catholic Theater interest and flexible enough to permit the rapid advancement of common standards without destroying local initiative.

* * * * *

AS SEEN FROM THE CHAIR

It would be impossible in this brief BULLETIN to cover every phase of that history-making meeting at Chicago--your own notes must be as extensive as our own--but a quick glance at the notes of our Chairman will give us some highlights worth remembering.

"As I look over my notes on the Chicago conference," writes Mr. Lavery, "these are some of the good things that immediately take my eye:

"The practically unanimous desire of the delegates for a simple plan which makes our common experience available for study and imitation--with particular emphasis on the desirability of a bulletin and regional meetings.

"Father Lord's estimate of the great power of the Catholic audiences in this country--the biggest potential audience in the nation today.

"Father Hartke's analysis of the operations of the Blackfriars' group over a period of five years, with special attention to the sacramental character of the work.

"Dr. Mahoney's report on the Catholic Repertory Theater of New York, which has done 350 plays in 24 years and which brought to light recently Parker's little known but definitely distinguished play 'Lourdes'.

"The stimulating record of the Catholic Actors' Guild in Buffalo, as described by Father Growney, who was at one time on the professional stage--a group believed to be the only diocesan dramatic organization functioning with specific episcopal approval. We will not forget Father Growney's convincing demonstration that Catholic Theater is not only an art but a paying enterprise as well--nor his ingenuity in inviting noted guest actors to play leading roles with his excellent group.

"The analysis of the strength of Catholic drama on the Continent as presented by Sister Constantia of Clarke College, Dubuque, Ia., with particular attention to Ghon.

"The remarks of Sister Mary Peter of Rosary College, River Forest, on the needless exploitation of children in the theater--which raises very neatly the question: do young children belong on the stage or in the audience?

"The exhilarating report of Sister Mary Leola, of Mundelein College, Chicago, on the work of the Verse Speaking Choir, which is now known throughout the world for its exceptional work on the radio.

"The possibilities in the workshop of the college theater as reviewed by Sister Mary Denatus of Immaculata--a sub-chairman, by the way, who was meeting playwrights in large numbers before she left the Chicago meeting, a most encouraging sign of the permanent success of the Conference.

"The advantages in the Catholic summer school of drama as outlined by Sister Consuela of Marywood, Scranton, Pa., who is conducting her own school this summer for teachers and advanced students of drama.

"Father Talbot's rousing talk on 'Drama in the News' with his clarion call for Catholic dramatists to write on contemporary problems in Spain and Germany.

"Mary Agnes Doyle's sketch of the great dramatic festivals in England in the light of your Chairman's own hopes for 12 or 15 cycles of college plays a year hence in this country.

"Father McLarny's appeal for Catholic drama that is essentially Catholic, a drama that will elevate the stage to its proper place in the American scene.

"Father Semper's scathing survey of the deficiencies of drama departments in many leading Catholic universities, with constructive notes on his own work for a master's degree in drama at Iowa--a point paralleled by Father Coughlin, S.J., of Jersey City, who is crusading for more majors in drama and more courses leading to M.A. with eventually a course like Yale's in many of our colleges; and contrasted with both these viewpoints, Father Lord's stimulating off-the-record question as to whether drama can be really taught in schools, especially under the present credit system which rules out from school faculties many of the best theater people, because they have not several degrees behind their names. 'Isn't it true that sometimes the best place to learn theater is in the theater?' Father Lord asked your Chairman one day, thereby raising the question whether in the future the best schools of the theater may be those allied with but not too formally identified with a university set-up.

"The proposal for a Catholic Workers' Theater on the Catholic Worker farm at Easton, Pa., as advanced by the Editor of The Catholic Worker, William Callahan--a chance for sincere Catholics to live a collective and cooperative life in the theater and raise themselves by their own bootstraps.

"The exciting field opened up by Dorothy Day's musical play for the Negro group from St. Elizabeth's High School, Chicago--and with it the exciting question: when is some Catholic dramatist going to give us a play on one of the most impressive personalities of our day--The Negro Priest?

"Father Nagle's reminder that poetic drama needs the Catholic faith because when man tries to soar in the theater, he must have wings to fly with.

"Norman Griffin's appeal for plays dealing with existing social problems, Mother Mary Josephine's (Cedar Rapids) plea for an adequate system of credits for dramatic work and Miss Margaret Mary Kearney's observations on the technique of the art of the stage, both as related to verse speaking and standards in high school groups generally.

"And finally your Chairman must add his own pet program: the opportunity for a dozen or 15 simultaneous cycles of college plays next spring. All it requires is for the leading college in each region to invite six or seven neighboring colleges to a conference. Let them plan their final bills of the year with reference to possible inclusion of these plays in a week of drama at a central place. Then in one week on successive nights we could see such plays as Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, Obey's Noah, Sierra's Cradle Song and Kingdom of God, Caponsacchi, A Saint in a Hurry, Everyman, The Joyous Season, Days Without End. If any college presidents are interested, please write me at Poughkeepsie and I'll send my favorite list! All the plan requires is a little collective planning--and then let Malvern look to its laurels."

* * * * *

RANDOM ECHOES FROM CHICAGO

The suggestion is already made that within two years we should have an International Catholic Theatre Conference--especially in view of the strength of Catholic drama on the Continent.

* * * *

Father Kuhlman, S.J., of West Baden, advances the suggestion that with some slight changes Monsignor's Hour might easily be made available for all-male casts in seminaries.

* * * *

A growing demand is evident for the appearance of Sister Mary Peter and Sister Mary Loola at Washington--and the Verse Speaking Choir of Mundelein as well.

* * * *

The Franciscan puppet play, My Lady Faith, presented by Marygrove College, is opening up a new field for many schools which are contemplating following in the field in which Marygrove has pioneered for four years.

* * * *

Most prevalent of all the impressions remaining from the Chicago meeting is a widespread admiration for the progress and vigor of the nuns in the Mid-West area. In the field of the theater, they are leaving the men's colleges far behind.

* * * *

And probably the most amazing impression remaining from the Chicago meeting is the staggering variety of Catholic theater. We all maintained for years that it existed and that all we need do is to coordinate it. But we never dreamed with what vigor it existed. And so when we for the first time met each other, we were amazed to find the distinguished work being done by laymen, priests and nuns of whom we had never heard before!

* * * *

At last we really know each other. And now the world will know us too.

* * * * *

COMMITTEES

A number of committees were appointed at the Chicago conference to stimulate at once the work of the Conference until the Washington meeting. We are happy to report that many of these committees lost no time in foregrounding and conferring even before the Chicago sessions were over. Your Secretary has in his files at the moment reports of these conferences in Chicago and since that time has received additional reports from other committee chairmen.

All of this indicates an enthusiasm and energy which augurs well for the future of the conference in general and the Washington meeting in particular. Then the results of the Committees' work will be reported at greater length.

Following are the Committee Chairmen now busily at work:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Primary Grammar		Sr. Marie Anthony St. Mary's Academy, Denver, Colo.
High School	(Boys	Bert Walker Loyola Community Theater, Chicago, Ill.
	(
)Girls	Margaret Mary Kearney 1314 S. 57th St., Phila., Pa.
Colloge	(
	(Women	Sr. Mary Peter Rosary Colloge, River Forest, Ill.
	(
)Men	Rev. Geo. H. Stomma Columbia Colloge, Dubuque, Iowa
Little Theater		Rev. G. V. Hartko, O.P. Catholic Univ., Washington, D.C.
Play Listing		Rev. Matthias Helfen Oconomowoc, Wisc.
Play Writing		Sr. Mary Donatus Immaculata, Pa.
Constitution		Rev. Daniel Lord, S.J. The Queen's Work, St. Louis, Mo.
Convention		Rev. J.J. McLarney, O.P. Dominican House of Studies River Forest, Ill.
Bulletin		Mr. Frank McDovitt Blackfriar Institute Catholic Univ., Wash., D.C.

(NOTE: Complete Committee Rosters were not submitted by Chairmen in time to make this Bulletin.)

* * * * *

FINANCES

Through the generosity of the delegates at the Chicago conference, the sum of \$252.25 has been made available to your Secretariate for conducting the affairs of the Conference until the Washington meeting. According to present indications, this sum should cover the necessary expenses adequately and it is our hope that we shall have a balance when the present period of gestation is at an end.

Please address all communications to the Secretary-Treasurer at the Blackfriar Institute of Dramatic Arts, the Catholic University of America, Brookland, Washington, D. C.

Your temporary headquarters are pleasantly and conveniently located and will become your center of information and assistance during the Washington sessions.

* * * * *

BULLETIN

In accordance with the wishes of the Conference, two numbers of this BULLETIN are being issued, the second to reach you several days before the Washington meeting, August 7 and 8.

Readers are requested to send to the Secretary-Treasurer the names and addresses of any interested persons or groups who were not represented at the Chicago meeting, so that copies of this and subsequent numbers of the BULLETIN may be sent to them.

* * * * *

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The first step in the arrangement of the program for the second meeting of the Catholic Theatre Conference to be held at the Catholic University of America Saturday and Sunday, August 7 and 8, has been completed by the Convention Committee under the Chairmanship of the Rev. J.J. McLarnoy, O.P.

An attractive variety of business sessions, sectional meetings, entertainment and addresses by prominent persons is in prospect at the present time. While details and certain important features have not as yet been worked out, we are reasonably certain that the full program will be ready in time for our second BULLETIN.

We are in a position at this time to give the general outline of the two-day sessions. On Friday, August 6, there will be registration and preliminary meetings of the Executive and other Committees. The following day there will also be registration and the first regular meeting of the Executive and other Committees. These meetings will be followed by the first General Session in the Blackfriar Theater in the gymnasium of the University. This meeting will be featured by an address of welcome by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph M. Corrigan, Rector of the Catholic University of America, and the keynote address by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the Catholic University. Following the assumption of the chair by Mr. Emmet Lavery, Chairman of the Catholic Theatre Conference, there will be announcements and committee and sectional assignments.

Sectional Meetings Scheduled

In the afternoon, the Committee in sectional meetings, as announced in the general morning session, will be held. Later in the afternoon, the second General Session will be held, at which speakers of note will address the Conference on various phases of the Catholic Theater Movement. These addresses will be followed by intermediary committee reports.

An informal Banquet will be held in the evening in the refectory of the University. Notable addresses and entertainment will follow the dinner.

The second day, Sunday, August 8, will open with a solemn Mass at which a sermon will be preached by the Very Rev. Msgr. Michael J. Ready, General Secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Later in the morning, further committee and sectional meetings will be held.

After an intermission of several hours, in which time conferees will be enabled to visit various points of interest in Washington, the third General Session of the Conference will be called to order. After additional significant addresses, final reports of committees will be made, including the report of the Constitution Committee and action on that report, and election of officers. The Conference will close with entertainment in the evening.

Other Well-Known Speakers

Among the other well-known speakers who will address various sessions of the Conference are:

The Rev. Francis X. Talbot, S.J., Editor-in-Chief of America; the Rev. F.G. Dineen, S.J., of the Loyola Community Theater, Chicago; the Rev. Urban Nagle, O.P., of the Blackfriar Institute; the Rev. Thomas F. Carey, O.P., Professor of Adolescent Psychology at the Catholic University; the Rev. Dr. John H. Mahoney, of the Catholic Reportory Theater of New York; the Rev. Vincent McDonough, S.J., of Georgetown University; Miss Agnes G. Regan, Executive Secretary of the National Council of Catholic Women; Charles A. McMahon, Editor of Catholic Action; Ann Ford, of the New York Theater Guild; Sister Mary Peter, of Rosary College, River Forest, Ill.; and Sister Donatus, of Immaculata College, Immaculata, Pa.

* * * * *

SPECIAL CONVENTION ANNOUNCEMENTS

Accommodations

The Convention Committee announces that a limited number of accommodations will be available at the Catholic University for men and women at no charge. Meals will be served at nominal cost. Since the number of rooms is limited, those planning to attend the convention are urgently requested to apply for reservations not later than August 1. Rooms will be assigned in the order of application. Make application to the Rev. J.J. McLarnoy, O.P., Blackfriar Institute, The Catholic University of America.

For those who shall desire or shall be forced to make hotel accommodations, we are advised that several of the downtown hotels have offered special rates for conferees. Please make your reservations through the Convention Committee not later than August 1.

The following hotels are comfortable and modern and located in the section of Washington most readily accessible to the Catholic University of America: Dodge, Washington and Raleigh.

The Wardman Park Hotel, one of Washington's better hostelrys, while not as conveniently located, is nevertheless the choice of many visitors to the Capital.

The Dodge offers single rooms with shower and bath, \$2.50. For groups of two or more in a double room or suite, \$2.00 each.

The Washington quotes rates at \$3.00 for a single room, \$5.00 for a double with twin beds.

The Raleigh has single rooms at \$2.50, double rooms with twin beds, \$4.50.

Wardman Park quotes \$3.00 for a single room with bath and \$5.00 for a double room with bath.

The Convention Committee emphasizes the importance of making reservations by August 1, so that it can select the more comfortable outside rooms in these and other hotels.

Registration

The Convention Committee wishes to urge upon conferees the importance of registering for the Convention.

Exhibits

The Committee is meeting the difficulty of limited space for exhibits, and for that reason has not invited as many groups to participate in the exhibits as it would wish. However, suggestions in this matter will be appreciated. Please communicate before July 23 with Father McLarnoy. The Committee is particularly interested in dynamic exhibits or demonstrations of work.

Banquet

The banquet scheduled for Saturday evening, August 7, will be informal and for the purpose of injecting a social and lighter note into the program. The addresses will be brief and on subjects of interest to all conferees and the entertainment will be the best obtainable in Washington.